in which dried fish, raw meat, ghee butter and other foodstuffs are openly displayed. These goods are always black with flies and as one drives through the narrow streets of the shopping centre a black, buzzing cloud obscures the windscreen. In summer it is much worse. The Arabs are curiously indifferent to this plague of dirt, bad odour and insects, and will sit for hours outside the shops, idly gossiping, while flies settle on their beards and faces, fall into their Turkish tea, or get mixed up with their rice. It is almost impossible not to swallow flies when one is talking, and the only remedy when in these districts is to keep one's mouth tightly shut. I have seen Arab babies lying in the open air, their eyes swollen and festered from some disease and covered with flies. Trachoma and cataract are common troubles among the Arabs, and it is surprising that epidemics of typhoid and dysentery are not frequent.

The blame for this state of affairs cannot be laid on the Arab peasantry, who are illiterate, badly paid and poorly nourished. They have been brought up for centuries in primitive surroundings and have come to regard their way of life as natural and even congenial. It is curious that where the poorer class of Arab has come into close contact with the American or Englishman he has imitated, in a bizarre and comic fashion, the Western style of dress, but he has stopped short at the more important aspects of our civilization. Perhaps, in his present state of culture, the Arab has an ingrained scorn of sanitation and health. By disposition, and owing to the intense heat of the summer months, he is a lazy individual, judged by our standards, working only when he must or when the fancy takes him. But there are deeper reasons for the Arab's tolerance of dirt and disease. To say that his attitude is inborn, as some visitors to the Middle East are prone to do, is begging the question.

The Arab has some admirable virtues, not the least of which is his strong sense of hospitality and charity. The poor man seldom goes away empty-handed, and the visitor is always sure of a meal, a resting-place for the night, and coffee. If not always strictly truthful, the Arab is unfailingly polite and his courteous manners would often put a European to shame. He has outstanding courage, particularly in battle, and despises meanness and immorality. He is frugal, kindly unless his fierce pride and spirit of independence are upset, and intensely religious. Indeed, what impressed me most about the Arabs of all classes was their extreme devotion to the faith of the Prophet, and their realistic interpretation of the Koran, which means more to them in their daily lives than the Bible means

to the majority of professing Christians. If an easy acceptance of poor and insanitary living conditions is one of the major faults of this race, as I believe it is, then such a shortcoming is easily counterbalanced by their innumerable virtues, which are seldom found in practice amongst Englishmen.

I have not had the opportunity to make a deep study of social problems in Arabia, but from my interpretation of what I have seen, I should not hesitate to lay the blame for the vices and backwardness of Arab life on the system of government which obtains in most regions. In principle it is comparable with the feudal system in Europe. Apart from the Bedouin country, where life is migratory and the tribes are tent-dwellers, the majority of Arabs are concentrated in the fertile valleys, where they can obtain water for their livestock and crops. In Oman, as in other parts of the continent, the coastal areas are ruled by paramount sheikhs, whose power is absolute and who are sometimes elected by their subjects, but who are more generally appointed by succession, the kingdom thus remaining in the hands of one family. Although many of these princely families are quite ancient, and have provided rulers for different sheikhdoms for centuries, it is not unusual to find one sheikh deposing another by force. Jealousy and a greed for more territory and power are frequently the root cause of tribal wars.

There is little that is democratic in the government of a sheikhdom. Through his judges and ministers, who are paid out of the royal purse, the sheikh administers justice. Often it is the justice of a tyrant, although some sheikhs are just and kindly and are regarded by their subjects more as 'fathers of the people' than as kings. All land belongs to the sheikh, who is theoretically custodian for his tribe, and he exacts revenues from merchants, shopkeepers, fishermen, pearling-fleet owners and merchants, camel breeders and farmers, in the form of a commission on all business, in addition to heavy taxes on the inhabitants of the towns and villages. There are, too, taxes on land and property, on fishing and pearling rights, and profits are even obtained from the sale (illegal and contrary to the treaties with the British Government, but still indulged in) of slave labour.

Apart from the pearling industry, one of the richest sources of income in Arabia is from the date plantations, and these, if not actually owned by the sheikhs, at least provide him with a handsome additional income. In recent years the Arab rulers have been considerably enriched by large sums paid for concessions by the oil

DESERT WARFARE

I have mentioned that tribal wars were largely due to lack of unity amongst the sheikhs, but there was one interesting and significant period in the history of Oman when the rulers of south-east Arabia were unified as a political force. This occurred towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the Wahabi sect (so potent an influence in present-day Arab politics), wielded great power in Arabia and were constantly at war with Great Britain, causing us considerable irritation in the early days of our trade along the Persian Gulf.

The Wahabis were a fanatical religious sect of Mohammedans, a branch of the Sunnis. They claim descent from Ali-bin-Abi Talib, the cousin and adopted son of the Prophet Mohammed, whose daughter Fatimah he had married. The failure of Ali to succeed his father-in-law was the cause of serious dissensions in the Mohammedan world, leading to interminable wars and schisms which split the Arabs into innumerable sects, of which the Wahabis are one. These schisms have continued to the present day, and are the main reason why, in spite of the Arab League, and the efforts of King Farouk of Egypt and King Ibn Saud to unite Islam, the Arab world will never coalesce as it did in the days of Mohammed.

The Wahabis, who will be remembered in recent times for the disaffection they fomented in Egypt, have always been schemers and political rebels. They are fanatical in the extreme, and are the most puritanical of all Arab sects, having little of the tolerance of the modern Arab. Their chief asset at one time was their religious and bloodthirsty intolerance, and being well-organized and trained fighters, they conquered a large part of southern and south-eastern Arabia. They held the Oman tribes in subjection and practically forced them into piracy and banditry, the purpose of this being to harass the British and cause as much political confusion as possible in the Persian Gulf. Paradoxically, it was this invasion of Wahabi influence which forced the Oman sheikhs, for the first time in history, to become united. Tribal wars ceased, because they were against the interests of the Wahabi leaders, and the sheikhs degenerated into little more than petty sub-chiefs and pirates.

At the beginning of the century, the power of the Wahabis in Arabia was finally broken. Piracy had been stamped out by the British naval authorities for many years, and by the Treaty of 1892 the Trucial Sheikhs ratified the earlier Treaty of 1853, which provided for the entire cessation of liabilities at sea amongst the signatories, and imposed on the British Government the duty of enforcing

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

On hot evenings Hassan would provide me with a silk *kufieyh*, or Arab gown—which I wore in place of my jacket and shirt; this is a loose, cool garment, ideal for desert conditions and climate. We would sit in rattan chairs on the roof overlooking the sea, sipping the delicious clove-flavoured coffee and discussing philosophy, belles-lettres, or the humanities. Because of his wide reading and understanding, Hassan could see life from the European as well as from the Arab point of view, and his interpretations of Arab mentality and character helped me considerably to understand his people.

Most of the Arab tribes in south-east Arabia are extremely strict in their interpretation of the Koran but, as with the followers of other religions, there are exceptions to this rule. Many who profess and call themselves good Moslems are extremely unorthodox in practice. The fast of Ramadan is, without exception, vigilantly observed by all Mohammedans, but a great many Arabs, especially those of the merchant class, fail to observe the stern tenets of the Prophet. Prayers are dutifully said at the prescribed hours, especially at sunset, when the faithful perform their genuflections and prostrations with religious zeal. But the middle and upper classes are rather liberal in their religious ideas. It is not uncommon for an Arab to smoke, even in public. The younger men prefer Turkish or Egyptian cigarettes, although most of the native shops in Sharjah and Dubai were well stocked with 'Lucky Strike', 'Camels' and 'Players', the source of these supplies being traceable to the U.S. and the R.A.F. canteens. The troops had no scruples about selling their rations for cash.

The older men would smoke native-grown tobacco in tiny pipes scarcely bigger than an acorn cup. After a few short puffs the brittle leaf would crumble into ashes, but they seemed to derive such pleasure from these brief smokes, perhaps because the leaf was tinctured with hashish. After use the pipe is placed in a small sheepskin pouch, which the Arabs carry about in the folds of their *abbas*, or gowns. The hubble-bubble is a Turkish innovation, used largely by the Persians and Parsees, and a crude form of this pipe is manufactured in Oman and sold in the bazaars.

The Arab seldom touches alcohol, and it is an offence to distil, import or drink it in Sharjah territory. Nevertheless, a certain amount of bad Indian gin is brought in by the ships, and arrack is certainly distilled by the Indians in secret. I have never seen an Arab in these parts drink spirits, although an American officer once

The pure-blooded Bedouin, the gypsy of the desert, whom one finds all over Arabia, is the most orthodox of all Arabs. He scorns with pious horror the tales of witches, djinns and devils. Yet even he will hesitate to slay a hyena; for do not witches ride upon their backs when the moon is full? One cannot condemn these children of the sands for holding the unknown in such awe, or for peopling the *wadhis* and caves with imaginary forms. There are people to-day in Ireland who believe in *sidhe* (fairies), descendants of the Firbolgs, and who shudder at the mention of banshee or leprechaun; the Scottish highlander is little less credulous, whilst in lonely parts of Wales old women still practise sorcery and stick pins in waxen images.

The Arabs have some reason to be superstitious. There is something formidable and furtive about the limitless expanse of the desert, with its distant mountains, its mirages and deep silences. Time in the clock sense has no meaning, and to-day is but yesterday to-morrow. Those who pray daily that the wells may not dry up; who subsist on rice and dates and dried fish; whose sole possessions are a camel, a donkey, two wives and a tent or palm-leaf hut, must think in terms of simple equations. If they personalize the unknown and the elements which control their lives, who are we to criticize them?

The stars that nightly twinkle above their goats'-hair tents; the Shimal that blows sand-clouds into their eyes and ears, and the pitiless sun which blackens every plant that dares to show a blade in summer—all these are no mere scientific phenomena to the Arab. The man who can read the life-history of a camel from a rough track in the sand has a dark mind which sees deep motives in all objective existence and even in inanimate things; he peoples his world with forms that are mere chimera to the Westerner. The mention of a unicorn does not make him laugh.

2: O'Shea G-8 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

533 265 complaint is not confined to the B.C. I have heard similar songs in China and Oklahoma, and assume that unrequited love is a global ailment.

At a sign from Hassan, the old record-player began to play some tangos which took me back to the late twenties, and the audience began to smile broadly and drummed on the tables with 265 their fingers in response to the rhythm. Most of the café habitués 517 were business men and shopkeepers, who assembled there daily 521 to discuss stocks and prices. Two of them came to sit by us and the conversation, directed by the learned Hassan, turned to religion, or rather the differences of the Mohammedan and Christian versions. The similarity between certain passages of the Koran and those of the Bible were seized upon, and a bearded patriarch confessed with a twinkle in his eyes that the Prophet had been well-informed in the gospel of Christ and, as all knew who had read both holy books, had derived not a little inspiration from the parables.

•771 The essential differences of the two religions lay in their conception of morality; thus some Christian concepts of human behaviourism, such as the negation of violence and vengeance, are diametrically opposed to the tenets of Islam. The Koran has a great deal of beauty, however, and its teaching of brotherly love and its philosophy of man's essential one-ness in the sight of God, alone have given it a deserved immortality. A really good Mohammedan is, in some ways, better than a good Christian; he will certainly die for his religion, if needs be, and his concept of life is far less material than that of the confirmed church-goer.

000 Hassan mentioned several Englishmen who have been converted to Islam, among them the late Lord Headley, President of the British Muslim Society, and the patriarch told us, to our great surprise, that he had made a journey to London some years ago and visited the mosque at Woking. He had a very great admiration for Lord Headley, a Haji who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and whom he regarded as sincere and devout.

The sun was sinking below the house-tops, gilding the streets with a golden haze, so after shaking hands with the merchants and making our salaams, we rose and departed back to the Fort.